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ABSTRACT

A qualitative study of the perceptions of mentoring by early childhood teachers provides evidence for the concept of transformation for both mentor and protege in their personal and professional development. The concept of mentoring in early childhood education is presented as a viable strategy in the effort to professionalize early childhood staff. The broad research question asked was: "What does a mentoring experience mean to a mentor and a protege?" An interview strategy was applied and questions were developed; coding of interviews is discussed. A model of transformation through mentoring relations, derived from the research findings, is presented. Dimensions identified as integral to the mentoring process at different stages are discussed. The second level of data analysis generated five major themes that provide a structure for the development of relationships. Themes identified are: (1) mentoring builds a foundation for growth and change; (2) mentoring promotes personal development; (3) mentoring promotes professional growth; (4) mentoring changes both mentors and proteges; and (5) mentoring provides benefits to both mentors and proteges. Findings are summarized and implications are discussed. (EMK)

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Transformative Dimensions of Mentoring: Implications for Practice in the Training of Early Childhood Teachers

Arlene Martin & June Trueax

The field of early care and education continues to struggle with the challenging problems of how to provide high-quality care to young children from birth to age 6. There continue to be poorly prepared staff, inadequate standards of care, high staff turnover, low wages and benefits and poor working conditions for a predominantly female work force. However, consistent and systematic professional development may change these conditions and begin to make progress toward professionalizing the field. Professional development has become recognized as an important force in bringing about quality improvement in the field of child care and is receiving national attention and support. The concept of mentoring in early childhood education is viewed as a prominent strategy in this effort to professionalize early childhood staff. In this newly emerging area, current research lacks studies exploring the depth of the mentoring relationship and the promise it holds for promoting professional and personal development.

A review of current literature concludes that mentoring has emerged as a significant process in the professional development of beginning and new teachers. Mentoring has recently surfaced in the professional development movement within early childhood education as a tool for retaining early childhood staff and promoting the growth and development of novice and master teachers. Mentoring may also serve as a renewal for master teachers (Stevens, 1995) and form a new career level within the early childhood profession.

This paper reviews the results of a qualitative study of the perceptions of mentoring by early childhood teachers. In the fall of 1996, in-depth interviews, videotaped three-way interviews, and profiles of mentor/protégé dyads were conducted with ten participants from the California Early Childhood Mentor Teacher Program. The study defines the literature on mentoring in three areas: (a) the development of effective mentoring models for staff development, (b) the professionalization of both mentors and protégés, and (c) the building of early childhood advocates and leaders through mentorship practice.

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The Research Basis for Infusion of Mentoring in Early Childhood

Research on mentoring teachers is found in the literature on adult development in higher education. It has surfaced in the early childhood literature only in the last ten years as a practice to promote the growth and professional development of the various levels of staff who care for and educate young children. Currently there exist 15 national mentor-teacher programs in early childhood education (Ferraer, 1994). Literature on mentoring is derived from business and from adult higher education, from theoretical bases of adult learning and teacher development. Research on the mentoring phenomenon and studies conducted in teacher education, especially studies on the induction of new teachers, provided the ground for this study. Literature related to transformation of the adult learner was essential in addressing the guiding questions in this study.

An important trend in the professional development of early childhood practitioners is the growing use of mentoring as a strategy to recruit and retain novice staff in diverse early care and education settings. Mentoring has also been found to offer mature staff opportunities to renew and revitalize their careers. Currently, the literature on mentoring lacks comprehensive studies on the nature and effects of mentoring on both the mentor and the protégé.

Theories of adult learning and teacher development were reviewed as they related to the mentoring concept in professional development. Development is viewed across the life span and learning theories are seen through a constructivist perspective. Erikson (1959), Gould (1978), Kegan (1982), Loevinger (1952), Oja (1980) and Piaget (1952) provide theories of adult development and acquisition of knowledge. Recent reform efforts within the context of school restructuring and the professional development of teachers have led to studies on mentor-teacher programs in public schools and in higher education. These studies have related the effects of mentoring on the induction of new teachers, retention of experienced teachers, and assistance and support of beginning teachers. A number of studies on the process of transformation in adult development were reviewed. Daloz (1986), Levinson (1978) and Mezirow (1991) each describe the mentoring phenomenon as a transformational process.

The literature on transformation provided constructs for supporting mentoring as a professional development practice (Levinson et al., 1978; Daloz, 1986; Mezirow, 1991) and for applying it to the field of early care and education. Metaphors for this transformational process found in the emergent themes of journey, story and gift-giving (Daloz, 1986; Gehrke, 1988; Parkay, 1988) assisted in unfolding the dimensions and phases inherent in the relationship which were identified in this research study. The process of mentoring found within mentor/protégé dyads acts as a powerful change agent transforming both mentor and protégé (Whitebook and Sakai, 1995; Bellm, Whitebook and Hnatiuk, 1996).

Key components of mentoring models drawn from the literature of selected induction studies include:

(a) elements of a formal selection process;
(b) the importance of mentor dispositions;
(c) a willingness to share expertise in instructional strategies, i.e. communication, feedback and observation skills; and
(d) reflective practice.

Orientation and preparation of a mentor should utilize the literature on adult development, developmental supervision and transformation theory. Included within that content base are areas specific to the art and practice of teaching, developing instructional strategies and promoting effective interpersonal relations.

Transformative Dimensions of Mentoring: The Research Study

The broad research question asked, What does a mentoring experience mean to a mentor and a protégé, and how has it benefited both mentor and protégé in a mentoring relationship? Subquestions asked: In the perceptions of early childhood mentors and protégés, what processes occur within the context of a mentoring relationship that change or transform the personal and professional development of the mentor and the protégé?

The research design for this descriptive study used in-depth interview methods and the resulting profiles of the mentor/protégé dyads to answer the broad research question. Since this is an interpretive study of teachers' perceptions of mentor-teacher relationships in early childhood programs, a qualitative approach was considered best suited to inductive inquiry in a naturalistic setting (Merriam, 1991, p.19). The California Early Childhood Mentor Teacher Program was chosen for this study of five mentor/protégé dyads because it is the oldest and largest of the 15 national early childhood mentor-teacher training programs in the United States (Ferrar, 1994). The CECMTP serves as a national model among mentor teacher training programs in early childhood.

Subjects in this study were selected from 25 discussion group participants interviewed in a pilot study June, 1996. The population included both mentor and protégé dyads. Research questions were pilot-tested and refined. Interviews scheduled in southern and northern California were conducted in November, 1996. Data collected from individual and three-way interviews (mentor, protégé and researcher) were transcribed. Three distinct levels of coding emerged from the data:

1. open coding,
2. focused coding and,
3. selective coding.

In level-one coding, 267 open codes were generated. Two levels of coding further reduced the keywords from 131 focused codes to 70 selective codes. In the second level of coding, items were grouped into larger categories:

strengths and weaknesses (within the relationship), dimensions, benefits (to mentor and protégé) and transformation (changes identified by subjects). Codes within these categories were further analyzed to isolate patterns, trends or themes. Next, the researcher identified the most prevalent themes and searched for relationships among the themes. In this third level of analysis, a more selective coding system was utilized in which the relationships of mentors and protégés were reviewed in order to generate patterns, themes or implicit theories.

Voices from the Field: Mentors and Protégés Talk About Meaning-Making and Experience

Transformation is not a mysterious process but a natural life event (Nerburn, 1997). It is a logical and natural aspect of the mentoring relationship that transformation occurs for both mentor and protégé. This section discusses the research findings, beginning with an overview of the dimensions within the mentoring relationship, a presentation of the general themes identified in the interview process, and the relationship of these dimensions to the process of transformation. A schematic diagram of the mentoring dimensions found is included.

Dimensions in Mentoring Relations Leading to Transformation in the Adult Learner

Dimensions Found in the Mentoring Processes

Dimensions integral to the mentoring process in the perceptions of the mentors and protégés interviewed in this study were first identified. It was useful to organize the dimensions into a non-stage construct in order to relate them to the concept of transformation. Study findings revealed that the dimensions were fluid rather than fixed processes; that is they appeared in the relationship in a nonlinear manner dictated by the individuals' personalities and learning styles. A framework using periods of relationship-building represents the notion that these dimensions build over time due to regularity, collaboration and reflection occurring in the mentoring relationship (Fenichel, 1992). These processes may occur simultaneously or independently throughout the life span of the relationship.

The most prevalent dimensions identified were: (a) trust, (b) openness and acceptance, (c) support, (d) encouragement and, (e) comfort level. These dimensions describe a period in which the mentor and protégé find each other, either formally or informally. Protégé voices suggest that the mentor identified something special within the protégé that initiated the relationship. One of the protégés said, "He saw something in me..." This period is characterized as a building of the relationship, which explains why trust was the most frequently cited dimension, followed by openness and acceptance, while encouragement, support and comfort level followed. In the *relationship-building period*, these six dimensions were identified in each interview as important characteristics in establishing and maintaining an ongoing, authentic mentoring relationship.

Dimensions found in the next period–*a period for building an agenda*–emanated from the purpose for the existence of the relationship, which was to address content or instructional issues that would enable the protégés to become better practitioners in the field of early childhood education. Two dimensions emerged in the data that center on the mentor's skills of knowledge and expertise in the field of early childhood education. They are:

1. Knowledge encompasses the areas of child development, developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) and resources and instructional strategies, especially in the areas of guidance and curriculum development.
2. Expertise is defined by how competent the mentor is and what "gifts of wisdom" (Gherke, 1988) he or she brings to the relationship. It also includes years of experience in dealing with children and families, as well as expertise in problem-solving strategies.

In the following period, for *building an information exchange*, three dimensions were found:

1. the processes of communication,
2. feedback and,
3. reflection.

Styles of communication and feedback featured prominently in this period of relationship development. These dimensions determined the level of

authenticity and intensity the relationship would bear. Reflections on self and on others was significant for continued growth and progression toward transformation. It was evident in each dyad that this phase had the greatest divergence among the subjects in the areas of the individual's maturity, experience and life events. The dimension of reflection ensured the degree of intensity and authenticity within the dyads.

In the final periods, the change process was already occurring. This schema assumes that fluid processes occur in a nonlinear direction. The intensity and the authenticity of the relationship determine the temporal quality of the relationship and its subsequent transformative effect on both mentor and protégé. To put it simply, how quickly the relationship develops or progresses toward transformation is determined by the levels of intensity and authenticity involved. In the next period–*laying the groundwork for change*–the relationship moves from protégé dependency to a more collegial attitude in which the dimensions are responsible for the role reversals now seen within the maturingrelationship.

Finally, in a period of–*moving to transformation*–the roles have changed, the relationship is nearing its end, and a challenge from the mentor pushes the growth of the protégé. The dimensions of empowerment, risk and vision dominate this period. In a stage-related framework, this would symbolize the end of the mentoring relationship. However, participants in this study disclosed that their relationship had transformed them both personally and professionally, and the dynamic bonds of their relations kept them connected as friend and trusted colleague rather than as teacher and student.

Emergent Themes

The second level of data analysis generated the major themes that emerged in the research study and lent a structure to the development of relationships that were found in the final level of analysis. Themes surfaced through the searching of interview texts and keying in of selected codes that recurred throughout the interviews. In the open coding phase of the data analysis, 267 codes were reduced to 131 codes that recurred throughout the five cases. These codes were further categorized into 14 categories: benefit, change, closeness, comfort level, communication, confidence, empowerment, feedback, gifts and strengths, intimacy, not student teaching, openness and encouragement, reciprocity and risk.

Five major themes emerged in this level of coding, with 10 subthemes. Data analysis uncovered these themes from their recurrence throughout the fifteen in-depth interviews. The major themes identified in the perceptions of the mentors and protégés, universal to all cases, were:

1. Mentoring builds a foundation for growth and change.
2. Mentoring promotes personal development.
3. Mentoring promotes professional growth.
4. Mentoring changes both mentors and protégés.
5. Mentoring provides benefits to both mentors and protégés

Subthemes that emerged from these major themes were:

1. My mentor sees something in me ... permission to be who I am.
2. Mentors have something to share... gifts of wisdom.
3. Mentoring changed my self-perception and improved my practice.
4. Mentoring increased my self-esteem and self-confidence.
5. Mentoring changed me personally and professionally.
6. Mentoring promotes leadership and advocacy in the early childhood field.
7. Mentoring offers benefits and empowers each person
8. Mentoring offers renewal in the early childhood field.
9. Mentoring is more than student teaching.
10. Student teaching is not like mentoring.

Mentoring transforms individuals through the processes of empowerment, risk and vision, three of the dimensions found in this study of mentor/protégé perceptions. It transforms both mentor and protégé by providing them with opportunities and incentives to challenge them to continually improve their practice and their professional self. By seeing other ways, a new vision is developed that moves them beyond their comfort level, moves them to risk-taking, and in the process, empowers them to become a better teacher, a better professional, and a better person. For the mentor, mentoring is transformational in that it renews and revitalizes the seasoned practitioner by providing a new vision. Further, it adds new skills, status and financial reward. Mentoring creates opportunities for personal empowerment and professional growth as both practitioners become more reflective, a critical aspect of the mentoring relationship (Mezirow, 1991).

For protégés in the relationship, mentoring offers them a voice, a place to tell their stories and to be validated in their experiences. This experience of having a voice was expressed in each interview and represented a difference for them in the meaning of their relationship from the experience of the student teacher, since each of them shared classes with people who were not being mentored but were in traditional student-teaching roles. The protégés heard and felt these differences when they discussed their relationships during class seminars. Often the student teachers were jealous of the relationships mentors had with their protégés. Some wished they had chosen mentoring instead of student teaching, and others felt they had been cheated in their relationship because they weren't receiving the benefits of mentoring.

Protégés expressed perceived differences between mentoring and student teaching in terms of the regularity of their meetings and the fact that there was a mutual, reciprocal relationship in which each participant was learning from the other. Most importantly, protégés had a voice in getting what they needed from their relationships. They viewed student teaching as a nonreciprocal, one-way relationship in which the student's agenda was set by the cooperating teacher and as a result the relationship was imbalanced. Through mentoring, on the other hand, protégés were encouraged to find their voice, to use it and to further challenge their mentor with their voice, in the process of inquiry

and risk.

Mentor/protégé voices affirmed their implicit theories that mentoring provided mentors with a renewal and revitalization in the field of early childhood. It provided protégés with an apprenticeship in which to learn new ways, practice new skills and build new ways of communicating. Participants believed that both mentor and protégé gave each other permission to be themselves and they were able to risk and create a new vision of themselves. They believed that the journey was worth the effort to better know themselves and finally the risk of losing that perception of self in search of a new, expanded version. Mentors and protégés believed that mentoring empowered them to become the advocates and leaders that the field of early childhood needs. Mentors were preparing themselves for larger advocacy and leadership roles, while protégés were preparing to become the next generation of mentors.

Components of a Mentoring Model

Studies of induction programs and recent initiatives in the field of early childhood provide elements and features of successful, effective mentoring models. The elements of regularity, collaboration and reflection surfaced in the literature on mentoring (Fenichel, 1992). Induction study findings indicate that there are common elements that support successful mentoring models. Such elements, identified throughout a range of induction studies, include:

1. selection of mentor dyads,
2. mentor dispositions,
3. preparation of the mentor teacher in the complexities of mentoring, and,
4. program content.

The relevance of these induction studies and their use of mentoring models demonstrates the significance of the mentor role in supporting and assisting new or beginning teachers.

The content which best prepares the mentor to work with a protégé comes from the literature on adult development and on developmental supervision. Developmental supervision offers the early childhood mentor teacher a support strategy and a nonjudgmental approach to providing observation, clear communication and feedback, and the strategies to identify the most important areas of new teacher (protégé) needs (Caruso and Fawcett, 1986; Glatthorn, 1987; Glickman, 1990). The content base in any preparation program must include:

1. adult and child development,
2. developmentally appropriate practices for working with adults as well as young children,
3. reflective practice and,
4. developmental supervision.

Other features of effective mentoring programs drawn from the mentoring literature included:

(a) the elements of a formal selection process and a formal vs. informal

mentoring program;
(b) mentor dispositions or characteristics;
(c) willingness to share expertise in instructional strategies and systems to provide communication;
(d) feedback and observation skills, and,
(e) reflective practice.

Orientation and mentor preparation are derived from the literature on adult development, developmental supervision and transformation theory. Included in its content base are areas specific to the art and practice of teaching, such as developing instructional strategies and promoting effective interpersonal skills. Finally, elements to ensure program effectiveness include:

1. rewards,
2. incentive and recognition for the mentors;
3. time to meet regularly and,
4. time to practice reflection and collaboration.

Developmental supervision is derived from a social work model of clinical supervision. It requires a non-judgmental approach to supporting the protégé's acquisition of job skills, and their personal and professional growth. Identifying the protégé's level of knowledge, skills, strengths, interests and learning styles, leads to the selection of the supervision approach used. This knowledge of the individual informs the mentoring process in many ways, one of which is in determining the choice of a directive, collaborative, or indirect approach to supervision. During the mentoring relationship, mentors may adopt each of these approaches as the protégé changes.

Summary of Findings

This study makes two significant contributions to the field of early childhood education. This is the first study of its kind on the depth and nature of the mentoring relationship for professionalization of staff in early childhood settings. The second contribution is that it provides evidence to support the concept of transformation for both mentor and protégé in their professional and personal development. In-depth interviews and dyad profiles revealed 16 dimensions which occur over time and ensure that the process of transformation is completed. Data analysis identified five major themes and ten subthemes which support the overarching research question, What does a mentoring relationship mean to a mentor and to a protégé, and how does it benefit each one personally and professionally? Findings revealed that mentors and protégés gained increased self-confidence and self-esteem and improved their practice. Each mentor and protégé recommitted to remain in the field of early childhood, renewed their professional interests, sought higher professional goals, and became more career-directed with interests in the areas of advocacy and leadership.

Though transformation does not occur within every mentoring relationship, the potential to transform is however available to everyone engaged in a mentoring relationship. A significant finding of the study indicated that

transformation is inherent in the mentoring relationship. The 16 dimensions within the relationship which emerged in the findings ensure transformation. All participants perceived that they had transformed both personally and professionally through risk-taking, empowerment and vision change. Growth is change and change is risk. Risk empowers one to see in new ways, try new things and changes one's vision. Vision change transforms, and the transformative process is achieved within the mentoring role.

Mentoring offers the field of early childhood education strategies and supports to professionalize and expand its membership. It builds advocates and leaders in the field of early childhood education. It offers mentors revitalization and renewal, which offers them strong incentives to remain in their chosen field. It offers novice early-childhood teachers opportunities to gain new knowledge and skills, and new ways to approach the profession. It increases their self-confidence and self-esteem, improves their practice and makes them better professionals. Mentoring relationships transform the personal and professional domains of both mentor and protégé in the relationship. These findings offer strong promise for building a professional culture and for the professionalization of the membership in the early childhood field. Furthermore, mentoring provides for expansion of a new leadership and advocacy in early childhood. Mentoring also offers a hope for the infusion of mentoring models into the teacher preparation programs and the in-service training programs to support new-teacher preparation and staff development within the field of early childhood education.

Implications for Educational Practice

The training, education and supervision of early childhood staff present many challenges to staff-development planners and administrators. Such personnel most often come to their positions with limited educational backgrounds. Research indicates that education and training are vital to the delivery of high-quality early childhood services. Furthermore, trained staff are essential to ensure the mental health and well-being of young children in nonmaternal settings. Early childhood environments constitute especially difficult settings for training and supervision, since routine chores, rigorous daily tasks and the continuity of care necessary for providing for high-quality relationships must prevail. As a result, formal in-service training and ongoing regular and collaborative supervision are necessary. For this reason, mentoring is crucial. Mentoring models support helping relationships relevant to early childhood programs. In environments that are often isolated and lacking mechanisms for formal in-service training programs, mentoring models offer a new paradigm for education and supervision within the context of the early childhood community.

Mentoring provides a rationale for the integration of theory and best practice and a means to offer staff practical approaches to the personal rigors of caring for and educating young children. Within the mentor/protégé relationship lies a mechanism for translating the dynamic and powerful model

of the caregiver/child relationship described by Parkay (1988) as a mirror of the parent/child relationship. Mentoring as a "relationship for learning" (Fenichel, 1992) suggests that mentoring is a suitable and practical vehicle for training and supervision among all levels of early childhood staff.

In the field of early childhood, mentoring offers opportunities to train staff to a new professional level. It offers a promising mechanism for inducting new staff and retaining older, experienced staff. The nature of the mentoring relationship provides a powerful, intimate role that matches the nature of the early childhood professional within his or her work setting. It offers staff members ongoing supervision and regular reflection. It can also help staff to develop individual goals and create an awareness of the professional self, thus promoting professional development.

As a profession, early childhood is experiencing tremendous growth and change as a result of the demand for program expansion. Staffing issues pose critical problems in all types of early care and education settings. The practices found in most early childhood environments allow for easy acceptance and inclusion of mentoring models into their training, supervision and staff development. Despite some cautions offered in the mentoring literature, the transformational power of the mentoring relationship itself is what appeals to the educator and merits the most attention within the early childhood community.

Mentoring as a strategy in the professional development of early childhood educators can be a significant tool for supporting and assisting new and beginning teachers and can also provide renewal and rejuvenation to more experienced teachers (Arin-Krupp, 1985; Killian, 1990; Stevens, 1995). Though it is only within the past 10 years that mentor training programs have emerged in the field of early childhood education, these programs suggest promising practices for the field and are now being evaluated for positive outcomes.

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